



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΕΤΑΙΡΙΑ ΕΦΑΡΜΟΣΜΕΝΗΣ ΓΛΩΣΣΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ
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INTEGRATING CULTURE IN THE CURRICULUM: A SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

1. Introduction

In foreign language learning there is a revived interest in the teaching and learning of culture. Whereas in the 70's and the 80's, culture has been primarily seen as an integral part of **social interaction**, the overall goal of present day interest is to teach culture as **difference**. Learners are expected to understand the **otherness** of the target culture not only as **product** i.e. outputs or facts about culture, but also as **process** that determines actions, beliefs and ways of thinking.

In this paper I will discuss a) how **culture** as **process** is best integrated in foreign language learning and b) how culture learning can enhance learners' **cross-cultural awareness** and understanding.

2. Culture in foreign language learning

On examining syllabuses carefully one notices that cultural issues have permeated them in an arbitrary way. They manifest themselves in one way or another in sections referring to sociocultural competence, compensation strategies and politeness issues, in the themes and topics suggested, etc. See for instance van Ek and Trim (1991).

On the other hand, McCarthy and Carter (1994) put forward a different categorization of culture in relation to language teaching materials. As a matter of fact, they provide specific definitions of culture as they are discerned in language teaching, namely, culture in art and literature, culture and the daily life of a group of people and culture as social discourse.

As I have argued in Papaefthymiou-Lytra (1995a), however, learners are provided with fragmented information of **facts** about culture as related to language in use. Knowledge of the linguistic structure and the sociolinguistic rules does not automatically carry with it 'any special insight into the political, social, religious, or economic system' of the target culture and country, which usually shapes the processes operating in the particular culture as well as the meaningful options available in the society.

Language learners need to develop a coherent understanding of the basic orientation of culture and the most characteristic processes, symbols and meanings operating in the target society in order to communicate successfully. An awareness of the cultural orientation of the target culture will help language learners to develop a

working hypothesis about the L2 culture for comprehension, production, interpretation and creativity purposes. See Papaefthymiou-Lytra (1995a) for a discussion on this issue.

However, an important question arises: How best can language learners develop a working hypothesis about the target culture? In other words, how can learners understand and appreciate the otherness of the target culture not only as product but also as process?

Native speakers rely on a particular conceptual framework to make sense of the construction of reality. This conceptual framework makes up their particular cultural identity. In fact, processes influence the way human beings cognize the world around them in a particular society and play an important role in setting up cultural frameworks for reference in order to interpret human action. In other words, processes help us to understand and explain why people think or act the way they do.

As I have argued in Papaefthymiou-Lytra (1995b), if learners are given a chance to view the processes operating in the target culture and the native culture in perspective it is expected to be easier for them to build up a working hypothesis about the orientation of the target culture. In this approach to culture learning learners are viewed as critical observers and participants not only of the target culture but also of their own.

Thus learners are placed in a position to consider the L1 and L2 cultures objectively as realizations of basic human needs and of human civilization of equal importance. In this way they can understand, appreciate and tolerate cultural differences (as well as similarities) better.

However, before exploring this view any further I would first give a brief account of the various definitions of culture and whether they have influenced curriculum design.

3. On Defining Culture: An overview

In order to account for the diversity and complexity of culture several definitions of culture have been put forward. Such definitions reflect different theoretical perspectives about what culture is and how it can be studied. Furthermore, they point the way to the methodology to be adopted in the foreign language classroom (Robinson, 1985).

As I have argued in Papaefthymiou-Lytra (1995a) **behaviourist** and **functional** approaches to culture facilitate cultural description and awareness of how people act. In the language classroom, behavioural and functional approaches to culture often lead to the study of discrete behavioural practices such as how to do 'X' in the L2, where 'X' is replaced by specific functions, strategies and appropriate linguistic realizations or non-verbal behaviours, etc. in specific situations. Or what is 'Z' like in the target culture, where 'Z' is replaced by institutions such as the family, entertainment, social structure, etc. In other words, it presents learners with societal

